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How to Teach Architecture – Remarks on the Edge of Polish Transformation Processes After 1989

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Abstract

The political changes in Poland after 1989 have resulted in a whole range of dynamic processes including the transformation of space. Until that time the established institutional framework for spatial, urban and architectural planning policy was based on uniform provisions of the so-called planned economy. The same applied to the training of architects, which was based on a unified profile of education provided at the state's technical universities.

The effects of the political system change are reaching far beyond the political and economic arenas. The existing urban planning tools lost their value because of factors such as liberalization of regulations and scale of investments. Poland witnessed the phenomena of suburbanization and the uncontrolled transformation of space. In addition to legislative action, education is the tool that can improve this situation, especially in the field of spatial development. The article discusses education in the field of architecture as an important tool that could improve the existing state of uncontrolled transformation of landscape and spatial disorder in the built environment. The analysis is based on examples of different fields where architectural education takes place and affects the future form of the built environment. The articles ask question about architectural education: What are the hopes placed on it, what are the already visible effects and the expectations of the long-term effects? This analysis focuses on a number of aspects of architectural education: the fields for education of future architects and the lifelong learning of architects already active in the market. There is also a need to mention the importance of the architectural education of future recipients of architecture, namely children and young people involved in different actions on the national and local level.

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1. Introduction

Recent decades in Poland have been a time of great transformation, which has not only been concerned with reversing the political system to western standards of democracy. Fascination with the liberal economy (which seems to be good in short-term thinking) does not necessarily prove useful in long-term planning, which characterizes the nature of spatial development. Urban and architectural planning needs to offer a long-term vision to assure that all aspects of proper development are considered. After more than two decades of changes, we can observe a wide spectrum of mistakes like the uncontrolled growth of cities, suburbanization, spatial chaos and other inefficient and ineffective infrastructure works, etc.

What has been obvious for architects and urban planners for many years has not been so clear for politicians and society. The first meaningful sign regarding the need for a radical change of this tendency became visible in 2011 during the Polish presidency in the EU. In September of 2011 the conference EFAP “Innovations in Changing European City” (Fig.1. a, b, c) took place in Gdansk (also the conference of ENACA¹ [1] took place at the same moment).



Fig. 1. (a) (b) (c), EFAP Conference in Gdansk 18-20 September 2011; source: archive IARP (<http://www.pomorska.iarp.pl>), Photo by M. Andrzejewski.

The event was organized by the Ministry of Infrastructure together with the Chamber of Polish Architects, and Association of Polish Architects [2]. More than 160 professionals from all EU countries took part and also discussed, among other problems, the document called: “Polska Polityka Architektoniczna”² (Polish Architectural Policy) [3], which was presented by Association of Polish Architects (Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich SARP). Main issues of Polish architectural policy concern with: professional management of the built space with particular emphasis on spatial order, protection of landscape, and cultural heritage, coherent system of spatial planning, ensuring the conditions for sustainable development, the procurement of design and realization with particular emphasis on architectural and urban competitions, urban and architectural projects based on public-private partnership, promotion of culture of space, including education, promoting the importance of cooperation with professional associations and NGOs organizations.

2. Architectural education as a tool for long term change

One of the most important values beside the political will is the education in every mentioned aspect, which includes every possible level from administration, universities and schools, to the local communities. This type of education works to protect against the promotion of negative tendencies like suburbanization, the uncontrolled transformation of

¹ European Network of Architects Competent Authorities – forum responsible for administrative cooperation and exchanging best practice in the implementation of Directive 2005/36/EC on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (PQD) [1];

² The document developed by following organizations: Polska Rada Architektury, Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich SARP, Towarzystwo Urbanistów Polskich TUP, Izba Architektów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej IARP.

space, and poor aesthetic value of the built environment. Architectural education, in addition to legislative action, seems to be the most important tool that can improve this situation, especially in the field of spatial development.

2.1. Educating future architects

In Poland we can observe many changes and the creation of new forms of education and approaches in the field of education for future architects. Developing constantly since 1989, these changes have taken place within the framework of different types of universities, innovatory profiles and curricula, additional exchange programs (e.g. Erasmus), as well as in the profile of studies.

2.1.1 Universities (different types of universities, diverse profiles and curricula)

The educational system has had to react to new challenges in the field of architecture and urban planning. On the Polish educational market after 1989, new institutions arose that adapted to the new needs. These institutions were often private universities offering diverse profiles and following trends (design, interior design, landscape architecture, sustainable development, revitalization, urban planning and management planning). Thus the nature of the architectural profession and consequently the training of future architects in Poland have changed significantly.

New disciplines and profiles in architectural education that have become more and more important include: revitalization, sociology, sustainable development, and new technologies, among others. Taking into consideration the interdisciplinary character of the architect's profession nowadays, it seems that the development of new innovative curricula is a response to changing market expectations.

Polish architectural faculties together with institutions all over Europe are active in building cooperation in order to increase standards of education. A good example of such a network is the "BeInterBaltic" program where universities around the Baltic Sea region are developing interdisciplinary teaching methods within one of the Erasmus programs called "Strategic Partnership." Collaboration within the network of the European universities also allows for alternative methods for further training such as: extracurricular activities, workshops and summer schools [4].

2.1.2 Higher Education Area (additional exchange programs, e.g. Erasmus, changes of the profile of studies – the Bologna process)

University architectural education during recent years has undergone the process of unification with European standards according to the Bologna process.³ This has enabled Polish universities to harmonize with the level of higher education in other European countries and students and teaching staff to cooperate on the European level. Numerous opportunities were created to improve the quality of studies and open borders between universities. Poland has been very active in this field for over 25 years. Fundamental changes associated with the Bologna project have included: the introduction of a system of accounting for teaching units using the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), which are assigned to each class depending on its importance to the field of study; and the division of the form of studies into two or three stages. Nowadays Polish students have wider access to international studies through the ERASMUS program. Harmonization of student assessment at the universities covered by the program has made offers for the international exchange of students much easier to prepare.

Students can gain experience through numerous internships offered within the European programs, but also enter the labor market just after completing an undergraduate education (Bachelor's degree). However, many fields like

³"The Bologna Process is a collective effort of public authorities, universities, teachers, and students, together with stakeholder associations, employers, quality assurance agencies, international organisations, and institutions, including the European Commission. The main focus is: the introduction of the three cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate), strengthened quality assurance and easier recognition of qualifications and periods of study." [5]

architecture education now suffer because one drawback of the system is the shortened time of education, which does not reduce the scope of the material in operation during a defined cycle of education. Moreover, professional qualifications in the field of architecture (achieved by state exams) can be obtained only under the condition of completing 4 years of study, which is not always the case in undergraduate education at architectural faculties in Poland. While the situation seems to be difficult, the Bologna Process has been introduced in the field of architecture with great effort, which has not been the case in other areas such as medicine or psychology. Without any doubt the process of internationalization in education and the development of new innovative exchange programs such as Erasmus will increase the competence of future architects. Now Polish requirements regarding the preparation of students through the process of university education fulfill the general demands of the EU. This should be treated as advantageous because it allows the inclusion of local specifics of countries, regions, or even profiles of universities, regardless of any visible differences that arise when comparing systems in particular countries or among particular universities.

2.2. Lifelong learning of architects already active in the market

Just as the education of future architects is important, we cannot ignore the importance of the ongoing education of professional architects and engineers who already work in the market. Polish experience in this field is constantly developing in various ways.

2.2.1 Professional associations

The Association of Polish Architects is an organization of architects with a long tradition (130 years) and interest in the promotion of architecture and high standards in the profession of architect. Especially now, through the promotion of architecture that encompasses also educational activities (lectures, exhibitions, workshops, conferences, public events and environmental publications), the organization is attempting to enhance the level of knowledge and architectural criticism and raise general public awareness of the problems associated with architecture.

In 2002 in Poland, due to the adaptation of EU regulations to Polish law, the Chamber of Polish Architects and Chamber of Polish Urban Planners were established.⁴ Among all the other tasks, the Chamber of Polish Architects regulates access to the profession. Polish requirements for access to the profession (appropriate examination and period of practical training) fulfill the demands of article 46 of the Professional Qualifications Directive (PQD), which sets minimum standards for the training of architects (also in cooperation with ENACA).

2.2.2 Additional professional training and educational programs

Education, which has been divided into two activities, is an obligatory task inscribed in the statute of Polish Chamber of Architects. Firstly, the task is realized by organizing lifelong learning for practicing architects. Secondly, the task is to direct education to different groups, especially to schools.

Lifelong education for practitioners is not obligatory in Poland unlike other countries (e.g. the USA, UK and others) where registered architects have particular requirements for continuing education to maintain their professional licenses. There are different systems of motivation, certification, and also methods including e-learning. In Poland, this still depends on the individual decisions of District Councils of the Chamber of Polish Architects. Generally, the drawback of the system relates to big differences among the districts in terms of the amount of members that can significantly influence possibilities for organizing the trainings. Usually District Councils⁵ do trainings in the form of monthly-organized events, which are often supported by external experts, and also representatives of administration,

⁴ Last year the Chamber of Polish Urban Planners was liquidated by an administrative decision of the Polish government. This shows in some ways how complicated the process is of organizing the structural background and constitutive role of self-government of the profession.

⁵ In Poland the Chamber of Polish Architects consists of 16 districts corresponding to the number of provinces (Voivodeships).

industry, other organizations, etc. The range of problematics addressed often depends on actual needs, but generally spans the theory and practice of administrative, technical, or ethical (and others) aspects. In recent years there were tendencies and efforts to centralize the process for the purpose of unifying standards and keeping them at the highest possible level (both the level of education and range of problematics of the profession covered in trainings). A successful model of the lifelong education applied in Great Britain was analyzed, but it must be said here that in order to reach the level of this good practice in Poland there would need to be much greater time invested.

Ongoing efforts are being made in Poland to deal with difficulties associated with the profession, especially when taking into account the complicated conditions of architectural legislative reality, and also the weak administrative position of architects and urban planners during the process of investment.

The above-mentioned difficulties explain the differences in intensity, methods and also expected outcomes of practicing the profession of architect in Poland. Nevertheless, Polish practice is still weak if compared with good practice in Europe.

2.3. Architectural education of future recipients of architecture

One initiative that has national coverage concerns the second task of directing education to different groups, especially to schools. The program of architectural education, titled "Kształtowanie Przestrzeni"⁶ ("Shaping Space") has been built on a model implemented in Ireland by RIAI (Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland) [6,7,8]. This program has the patronage of the Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, as well as other professional organizations concerned with education. The idea of architectural education for children is not new; the experience of organizations like PLAYCE⁷ [9] and other similar initiatives forms a good base for constructing an educational system addressed to young people, to build their awareness of the quality of spaces, environment and places in which they live. In Poland already in the 1990s there emerged some local initiatives promoting the idea of involving professionals and engaging young people in activities related to improving the built environment and public realm. The task is to make them sensitive to spatial order, and teach them how to dialogue with the natural surrounding and aesthetic. This kind of education usually took the form of workshops and other temporary events.

The program "Kształtowanie Przestrzeni" ("Shaping Space") is complex and in its effect, it is seen as continuing education realized in primary and secondary schools. It is offered in the form of a handbook with methodology that allows the teachers to connect the content to different subjects (integrating it e.g. with history, mathematics etc.) in a flexible way and in different scales [6]. The program takes issues with sensitivity to the social, technical, environmental, and aesthetic aspects concerning architecture and spatial order. To join the program a teacher does not need any special preparation, it is only necessary to complete a one-day training organized by the Chamber of Polish Architects. The program has already been implemented for several years. It is not obligatory, and the effects are dependent on the individual engagement of teachers and schools. To promote the program and the idea of architectural education, the Chamber of Polish Architects organizes annual competitions for schools. Unfortunately, this short history of the program's implementation does not allow for wider discussion and conclusions. It is rather the beginning of an idea that should be considered a long-term investment to be continued for years, and which needs continued support in the same way.

There is also an initiative realized in the Pomeranian District Chamber of Architects in the cooperation with the Faculty of Architecture at Gdansk University of Technology and with the support of the Office of the Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship. The program "Przestrzeń Wokół Nas" ("Space Around Us") is concerned with promoting knowledge and awareness of the Pomeranian landscape, its natural environment and public spaces [10]. The program

⁶ Programm "Kształtowanie Przestrzeni" ("Shaping Space") was created as an adaptation of the Irish original programme "Shaping Space" by The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland and has form of a handbook directed to a students and teachers [6,7,8].

⁷ "PLAYCE is an international association of architecture education. It is working as a network of professionals involved in engaging young people in activities related to the built environment and public realm." [9]

has also been prepared in the form of an internet platform and handbook [11] and its implementation is expected in primary schools with the aim of educating children in the age range of 5-12 years.

3. Conclusions

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, education, in addition to legislative action, is the tool that can improve the current situation of suburbanization and problem of transformation of space in Poland, especially in the field of spatial development.

The above-mentioned Polish experience and examples given prove that education in the field of architecture can serve as an important instrument that can influence the process of uncontrolled landscape transformation and spatial disorder in the built environment. Most importantly, these educational processes have to take place on different levels and cover a broad spectrum of activities. Nowadays in Poland we can observe the visible effects of a wide range of architectural education, which is influencing public awareness and the shaping of our environment. This gives us hope and expectations for long-term effects. Nevertheless, the greatest emphasis should be placed on the education of the young generations who are capable of creating a successful future vision of our cities.

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